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HB 4143 is political payoff under guise of Legal Aid

Democrats cut funding to Legal Aid over last two budget cycles

Salem, OR – A bill pending before the State Senate masquerading as a way to boost funding for Legal Aid programs, in reality provides only minimal funding for indigents while producing a huge payday for trial lawyers, traditional Democrat campaign supporters.

“This is nothing more than a political payoff under the guise of legal aid,” said Senator Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day). “This will only put a little into legal aid, while trial lawyers stand to gain tens of millions of dollars in additional fees, for ‘representing’ individuals who will never see a cent of the payouts from class action lawsuits.”

Over the last four years, the Oregon Trial Lawyers Association has pumped more than \$150,000 into the Political Action Committees of Democrat leadership, including \$35,000 to President Courtney, \$14,500 to Senator Rosenbaum, \$23,250 to the Senate Democrat Leadership Fund, \$23,000 to Speaker Kotek, \$10,000 to Representative Hoyle and \$45,250 to Future PAC. Trial lawyers have also heavily supported individual Democrat candidates over the past four years, with virtually zero to support Republicans.

House Bill 4143 would redirect unclaimed class-action lawsuit proceeds to an account that would produce interest only payments for Legal Aid services, and would allow trial lawyers to collect huge fees on unclaimed proceeds, increasing their take-home pay by millions of dollars.

It is hypocritical of Democrats to bemoan the need for further Legal Aid funding, considering they have cut funding to the program over the last two years.

“If Legal Aid is such a high priority for Democrats, why did the Democrat majority cut funding to the program?” said Ferrioli. “Between 2005 and 2011, the legislature steadily increased funding for Legal Aid, but current Democrat leadership has cut and then flat lined Legal Aid funding. In other words, the Senate President and House Speaker presided over the only cuts to the program over the past ten years. Legal Aid is only a priority for Democrat leadership when their political supporters stand to gain something.”

Republicans have offered numerous compromise amendments to House Bill 4143 that would have resulted in a bi-partisan bill but have been rebuffed.

“Not two weeks ago Democrats were earmarking this money for the Rainy Day Fund – but funding Legal Aid apparently polls better,” said Ferrioli.

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